

**WISE WORDS AND DUMBBELLS -
A REPORT ON A CONFERENCE PRESENTATION
GIVEN BY
ISTVAN JAVOREK.
BY
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“You will not bite your nails in my gym, now 10 push ups.” Welcome to the world of Istvan Javorek!

Coach Javorek began his celebrated career in Strength and Conditioning as a skinny fourteen year-old violinist in his homeland of Romania. Embarrassed by his gymnastic sister whilst on the way home from school, Steve (apparently easier to say than Istvan) promptly dropped the violin in exchange for dumbbells and has never looked back...

He was born into the East-European plyometrics movement (which they just called “explosive drills”). He has helped many athletes to achieve greater performance(s) applying his philosophy of Complex Conditioning through hundreds of programmes, which develop quick, fast and explosive musculature. Three examples who support the benefits of this kind of preparation are:

1. Dragomir Cioroslan, 1984 LA Summer Olympic Games bronze medallist, who is now the head coach at the US Olympic Training Centre in Colorado Springs for the US Weightlifting Residence Programme. He was able to perform a straight back flip after a 440 lb. clean and jerk. By utilizing Istvan’s programmes, Dragomir developed from a 15 years old 77 lb boy, who suffered from rheumatic heart disease and rickets, into a European record holder and one of the most harmoniously developed athletes that Istvan had ever seen. He became a multiple national record holder and champion in weightlifting, but he also won the Romanian National Body Building championship.
2. The second example is Istvan Tasnadi, the 1984 LA Summer Olympic Games silver medallist in weightlifting. He was able to jump up 20 times consecutively onto a 42 inch high box. He was also able to jump 8 stairs up on a stairway, and to record 7.1 sec. in the 60 m dash with a 246 lb. body weight.
3. Finally, Wesley Barnett. He was a multiple US National Champion and record holder in two weight classes, (100 kg and 110 kg), 6th at the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympic Games, and silver medallist at the 1997 Weightlifting World Championship. He was Istvan’s student between 1988-1991. During that time he recorded a 10.4 foot standing long jump, a 3.98 sec. 30 m sprint, a 36 inch standing vertical jump and 64 feet on the overhead backward 10 lb. medicine ball throw.

Steve was the main speaker at the highly successful RFU ‘Wise words and Dumbbells Strength and Conditioning Conference’ held in Northampton during July 2006, a worthwhile two-day event enjoyed by fitness coaches, nutritionists, rugby coaches and a number of coaches from backgrounds other than rugby.

Coach Javorek’s focus was on **Complex Conditioning**, a term given to his conditioning philosophy and title of his recently released book. This type of innovative approach is seen by many, including RFU performance staff, as being of benefit in the general physical preparation of athletes of all ages and fitness levels.

Javorek proceeded to give a full-on, practically led workshop on his various training methods and programmes. One thing you notice with ‘Coach’ Javorek is the enthusiasm he has for training and the ability to get the very best out of the athletes he is working with. It is not always easy to replicate such things in the lecture room in a demonstration, but the Worcester Warriors’ academy coach would probably endorse this, having spent two days as Steve’s model for the audience.

The programmes, or Complexes as they are known, are what Strength and Conditioning coaches will know as Combination Exercises. They are structured into a circuit format which allows the coach to determine the rest and recovery time in conjunction with the desired number of reps and sets.

Combination exercises are used to challenge the athlete’s neuromuscular system and co-ordination, but they are also effective in adding intensity to workouts breaking up the weekly grind of gym training. Steve even has a ‘Big Fun’ workout in a schedule in his book, suggesting that his sense of humour is intact even when he is responsible for athletes’ total fatigue.

Javorek’s exercises are based on basic movement patterns that we are all familiar with, such as the squat, lunge, twist, push, and the pull. These movements are performed naturally in basic movements throughout our daily lives, so translating the patterns into a training environment is relatively simple yet still challenging.

Dumbbells are used through Javorek’s training programmes for various reasons, an important one being to stimulate the stabilizing musculature. They are also very dynamic in nature and promote an increased range of movement. The very use of dumbbells takes up less room than the larger free weights, allowing the coach to work with more athletes in any given session. This is something we have tried out at Hartpury and it has been very successful at certain times of the season.

Examples of the exercises are pictured below – and you will notice that, although the exercise movements are simple, there is a high neurological demand placed on the athlete in his attempt to co-ordinate the various movements into a fluid exercise, which is something that will become natural with time and patience!

So why not change from the traditional approach of conditioning a rugby player like a bodybuilder with 3 sets of 10 reps on the major muscles groups such as the chest and

biceps three times a week? This is a question that we all asked ourselves after sampling the dumbbell demonstration and it is a valid question that is often asked by players. Perhaps the weights-room attitude prevails because everybody seems to do it – but is that a valid reason for maintaining the apparent status quo? It certainly makes you think why so many players and coaches insist on training rugby players like bodybuilders!

Dumbbells also have an immediate attraction for amateur clubs, as they are relatively cheap. Setting up a free-weights room is extremely expensive and players nearly always need ‘spotters’ who add an important safety aspect. This is not so with dumbbell work and even one set of them can be used by groups working in rotation.

We know from research that rugby is a power/speed sport with multiple bouts of short intense activity, where the ball is in play between 35-37mins with up to 25 tackles per player per game and heart rates up at 85% of max (Redding 2005). This is very different from the glory days of the 80s and early to mid 90s, the era when I watched Gloucester as a young lad and the ball was rarely exposed to daylight and any explosive movements were usually saved for the bar!

Javorek believes that, no matter what sport you take part in, an athlete should respect the rules of periodization and recovery. Periodization is the planned progression of an athlete through a series of training cycles, with different aims, leading to a planned peak in performance. (Baechle & Earle 2000). This is a point that certainly strikes home when you see aspiring players spending hours on ‘empty’ training sessions in the belief that more is good.

By performing an array of challenging and varied exercise programmes, the training sessions become more enjoyable, the stimulation will be more complete and every athlete will witness enormous physical improvement. The need for all athletes to follow a varied athletic training programme is encouraged by Javorek and this is important when working with developing rugby players to maintain their interest and natural athletic abilities without comprising their range of movement and natural growth.

Coach Javorek took the conference through various forms of his training programmes and one thing I did notice is just how big a challenge to the cardiovascular system these workouts can be. This is attributed to the circuit format he uses alongside the complexity of the exercises, with rest times lasting no longer than 60 seconds.

I went away from Steve’s workshop and thought about how I would incorporate these programmes into our structures at Hartpury. I have spent some time performing the exercises myself to see what type of effect it has. I do recommend that any coach should try a programme before giving it to a player as it aids your understanding and ability to coach it.

I found that, although Steve had laid out these specific programmes to use, I wanted to add elements of his sessions alongside my own thoughts and ideas. The results have been positive, with players enjoying the challenging nature of the exercises I have included and having an increased enthusiasm for gym-based training. I have also used some of these combination exercises in outdoor circuits and indeed during warm-ups for rugby sessions and other games, even using these ideas with the Netball academy at Hartpury.

I would highly recommend Istvan's website www.istvanjavorek.com and his latest book 'Javorek Complex Conditioning' as an excellent training resource. The sheer range of exercises and attention to detail are quite breathtaking.

As with any 'new' concept within conditioning, dumbbell work is built from strong foundations and principles of training. These basic principles should never be forgotten and should always form the basis of your training plan.... Just don't be afraid to try something different as long as it's safely performed with control and it meets the needs of the athlete.

Istvan's book, 'Javorek Complex Conditioning' is available via his website, www.istvanjavorek.com at \$49.99 + \$18.00 p&p. However the RFU has a limited number of copies available at the special price of £20.00 + £2.50 p&p. To purchase please send a cheque payable to 'Rugby Football Union' together with your name, address and contact number to Sarah Butterworth, RFU, Rugby House, Rugby Road, Twickenham, TW1 1DS or call 020 8831 6505/email sarahbutterworth@rfu.com for further information or to pay by credit card.

References:

Redding, D, (2005): Conditioning To Win – Training of the Rugby World Cup 2003 winners; presentation at the UK Strength and Conditioning Conference, 2005.

Baechle, Thomas. R. & Earle, Roger.W, (2000) Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning, 2nd Edition, Human Kinetics.

The following is an **example programme** based on Javorek's Conditioning. It would immediately suit an amateur player, working on a total-body programme, who can only work-out two or three times a week.

Warm up:

- 10 minutes on a rowing machine
- Dynamic flexibility work, including squats using the body weight rather than weights.

Main workout:

- Barbell back squat and up onto toes 4 x 10-12 repetitions.



- Dumbbell bench press 4 x 10-12 repetitions.



- Bent-over row with dumbbells or bar 4 x 10-12 repetitions.



- Dumbbell parallel push press 4 x 10-12 repetitions.



- Javorek's medi-ball abdominal work 1 set.
(Medi-ball is a bouncing medicine ball)



- Plyometric work on stairs, such as:
 - 4 x double leg bounds.
 - 4 x double-foot jump then sprint 10 metres. 2 repetitions.
 - 4 x double-leg bounds in zigzag lines.
 - 4 x stair sprints with both feet hitting each step.

Cool down:

- 3 minutes on a static bicycle.
- Any exercise at low intensity.
- Total body stretch.